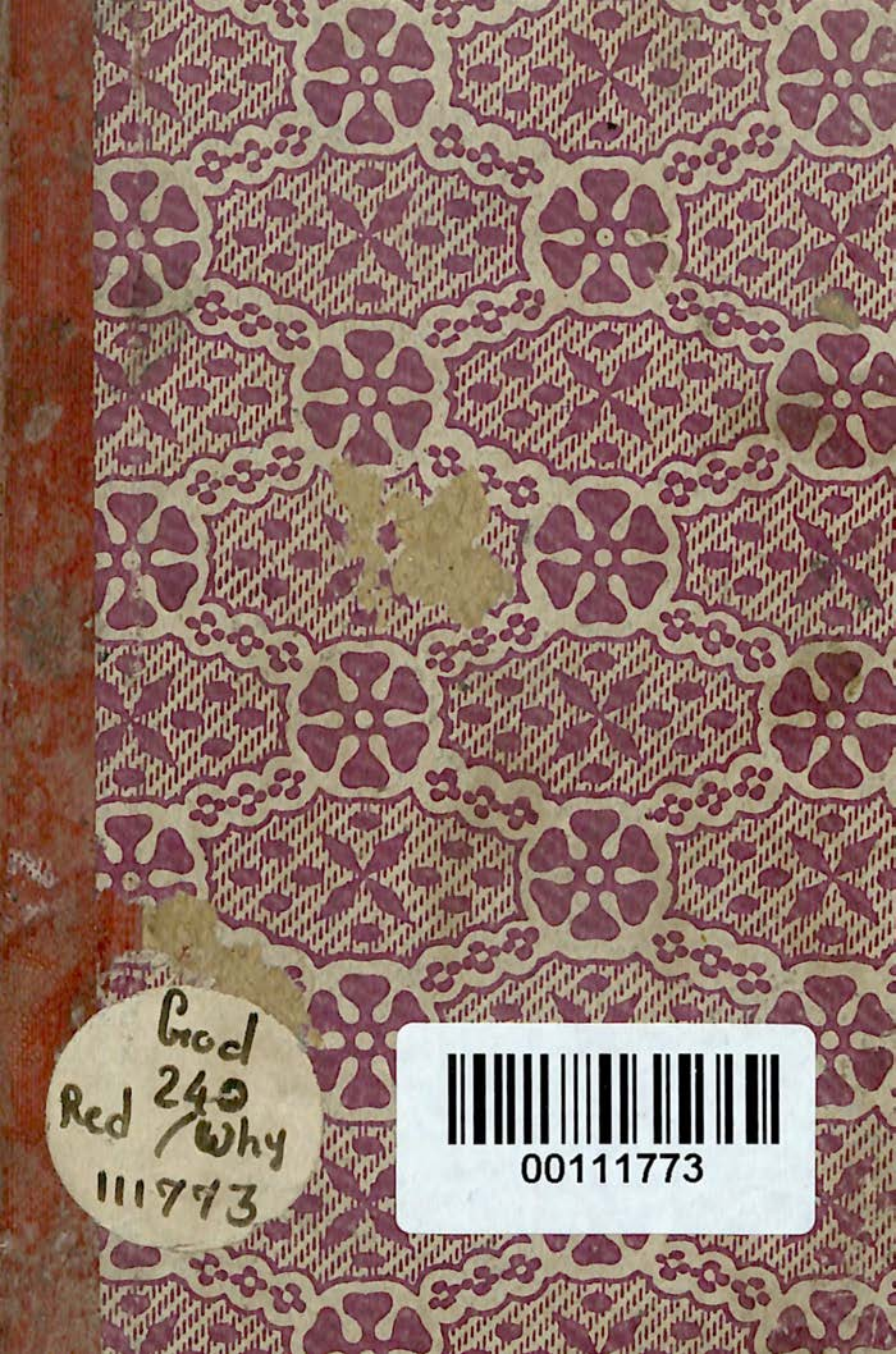
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WHY AM I A CHRISTIAN?

D-d-41

BY

VISCOUNT STRATFORD DE REDCLIFFE

P.C., K.G., G.C.B.

111773

Be ready always to give an answer to every man w
you a reason of the hope that is in you'

First Ep. Gen. of

'While the mind of man looketh upon second
it may sometimes rest in them, and go no fart
beholdeth *the chain of them confederate and*
must needs fly to Providence

London,
Henry S. King
1873.

HENRY S. K
65 CORNHILL & 1

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WHY AM I A CHRISTIAN?

IT may be said with more or less of truth that every age since the promulgation of Christianity, and perhaps every country within its pale, has had its free thinkers, its sceptics, and its unbelievers. No wonder, for we are told in Scripture that even in the lifetime of Christ numbers of His would-be followers fell off from Him on hearing the full extent of His requirements. Scepticism being of so old a date, how is it with the objections to which its professors principally appeal? I cannot take upon myself to affirm that novelty in that respect is altogether wanting to those who have latterly joined the ranks of infidelity; but such at least is the prevalent persuasion of many well qualified to judge. However that may be, one thing is unhappily clear enough: reliance on authorities long revered, on

doctrines held sacred by every class of Christians, now trembles in the balance and threatens to decline still more from day to day.

The Spirit of enquiry, so useful when properly directed, so dangerous when unrestrained by feelings of reverence, now drives its roots into every crevice of our establishments, and nothing, however solid, however time-honoured, is safe from its intrusion. A love of change predominates in all departments—a love of change, which has not always improvement either for its aim or for its consequence. The social relations are passing from one stage to another with unprecedented rapidity: political institutions give way to the pressure of numbers, theories, and combinations. Theological questions are debated on platforms, discussed at dinner-tables, dogmatised in newspapers, and sometimes not a little complicated by members of Convocation. The subject of highest importance both in a temporal and in a spiritual sense is tossed about from mouth to mouth like the newest piece of gossip or scandal, and that, which of all matters most requires to be fixed and clear, appears to break into more varieties and to gather a cloudier aspect in proportion as our

material prosperity and vaunted civilisation advance. I have no wish to go in search of the cause or causes of this extensive proclivity. The fact is enough for my immediate purpose, and judging from what I hear in so many conversations and read in so many productions of the press, I state it without fear of contradiction.

I state it, however, with an important qualification. Strong as the prevailing tendency to scepticism appears to have become of late, it would be wrong to overlook the increased and increasing strength of religious earnestness which characterises the clergy and other churchmen of our day as compared with those of the last century. Nor is this promise of a more healthy state of public opinion as to religious matters in future confined to members of the church of England. Numbers of those who dissent from the ritual or doctrines of our church may fairly take credit for a sincere zeal in the profession and practice of Christianity, and some indeed may boast with truth of having taken the lead in what may be called its latest revival.

This improvement, however partial and liable to premature relaxation, is, moreover, manifest, and, to

all appearance, progressive elsewhere than here in our Protestant Island. Of the two currents we are at liberty to hope that the more genuine and salutary one will ultimately obtain the ascendant, but in order to realise that hope, the spirit of religious faith must be sustained by well-united and strenuous exertions. Nor can the church afford to be less resolutely bent on discharging its high duties than was the devoted King of Israel, when he swore to take no rest, to yield to no desire of sleep, until he had found a place of local habitation for the Lord, his God. The powerful dissolvent believers have to counteract carries with it an evil which, though opposed to it in principle, gives a greater effect to its action. The many, whose spiritual faith is starched into outlines of substance by ritualistic forms and damnatory creeds, endeavour to promote their cause by throwing discredit on secular knowledge and popular institutions. The partisans of progress, impelled by the law of re-action, raise in consequence a counter-cry of alarm—of threatened danger—of darkness imminent, and making an idol of free thought, confound the love of liberty with a licentious distrust of religion. Both parties,

like the traveller in Æsop's fables, look to the weather for deciding the state of their garments, with this difference, that they tighten them when their zeal is hottest, and loosen them when it cools.

Expressed by its externals, religion is now subject to fashion nearly as much as dress. High Church, Low Church, and Broad Church are so many modes of taste in that department of opinion. Many of their respective votaries are, no doubt, sincere Christians, but the importance they attach to the ceremonials of worship, or to minor points of doctrine, weakens, if it does not destroy, that unity which Scripture declares to be the essence of Christianity.

Hence in great measure the divisions which, separating one class of believers from another, inflame the spirit of antagonism, and not only discredit the general faith, but affect the stability of secular institutions, and, in the case of national education, make it difficult to give religion its proper place in the instruction of youth. Humanity is not so constituted as ever to be of one mind in all things. Differences of taste and opinion will probably exist to the end of time. But the objects,

which disputation magnifies beyond their natural size, may be levelled down to their just proportions, and leave the grand eminences of truth so distinct and unclouded as to impress the commanding system formed by their combined testimonies on every candid and intelligent mind. My own experience falls in with this view, and in the course of conversation with others I have found reason to think that what I feel on the subject is felt by many.

The broad foundations on which Christianity rests carry with them an overwhelming conviction of its truth. The doubts entertained by those enquirers who see a camel in every gnat, a mountain in every molehill, may be said to have their source in particulars which offend the judgment either by some obscurity of language, or want of congruity, or as not coming under the test of the senses. To minds of a certain description such difficulties are, no doubt, serious stumbling-blocks, because they are apt to occupy a microscopic sight to the exclusion of other considerations far more comprehensive and at the same time coherent. The eye of a traveller applied closely to a milestone would be so filled with the one object, by com-

parison diminutive, that the surrounding landscape and even the road itself would be shut out from his view. What ought we to think of an artist or engineer who, having to describe a rural district or a city, should give pre-eminence to one exceptional feature and take it as determining the character of the whole region?

Having, myself, as I hinted above, been worried by impressions of that contracted kind, I wish, if possible, to afford my fellow-sufferers occasion to profit by my experience. This I propose to do by stating in a popular form and in terms divested of all pretension to ecclesiastical learning or superior discernment, the grounds of my persuasion that a full remedy for want of faith or inordinate scepticism is to be found in a steady contemplation of those grand evidences to which the Christian may confidently appeal, whether they precede, accompany, or follow the period of our Lord's appearance on earth. I cannot deny that even this humble mode of trying to give effect to my purpose is an act of presumption in my case. I excuse it to myself by virtue of the motive in which it has originated, and if more were required for its justi-

fication, I would plead my quality of layman. In treating of spiritual matters a layman lies under no suspicion of being affected by professional habits, or ecclesiastical interests, and his opinions may on that account be received the more readily by those who stand most in need of suggestive aid. It will be my endeavour to preserve as much brevity as can hold an even pace with clearness.

But I have previously to introduce a few additional sentences in the way of premise.

It has always appeared to me that the religion of Christ is addressed emphatically to each individual. There is no scriptural application of it to communities or social bodies of any kind whatever. Nature speaks in the same sense. We come into the world, and we also go out of it one by one. Each of us in his passage through mortality is characterised by his own peculiar qualities, whether bodily, intellectual or moral. His spiritual responsibilities are exclusively personal. It is related of Sir Walter Scott that on some occasion, when walking to church with the support of a friend, he threw off his companion's arm at the church door, exclaiming '*Here*, alone!'

In harmony with nature, baptism is an individual act, and so is the other essential sacrament, that of the Holy Eucharist. I remember hearing Mr. Whitbread say in the House of Commons that the responsibility of individuals lay in a future world, whereas in this present life only would States and their Governments be made to feel the consequences of their conduct. Hooker, in speaking of the Sacrament of our Lord's last supper, observes that 'the real presence of Christ's most blessed body and blood is not to be sought for in the Sacrament, but in the receiver of the Sacrament.' This also applies to the individual. It means, I presume, that if the elements are received by the person partaking them in their true spirit, they operate so as to confirm him in that state of communion with Christ which ensures the salvation of his soul. What then are we to understand by their true spirit? The elements are bread and wine. Does not the bread represent the body of our Saviour, who described Himself as the '*bread of life?*' Does not the wine represent the blood of Him who was the '*true vine?*' That body, was it not one of perfect holiness? That blood, was it

not shed in obedience to God's will? If so, does it not follow that the reception of those elements by a sincere Christian implies his acceptance of them as types of holiness and obedience, as rules of conduct and means of communion with Christ in both respects to him, the individual receiver?

Be it remembered that bread and wine introduced as food into the human system undergo a change which makes them in effect become the flesh and blood of a man's body.

It was an idea of ancient mythology that the earth was attached by a golden chain to the throne of Jupiter. According to the Revealed Faith every Christian is connected, or so at least it may be thought, with the presence of his Heavenly Father by a ray of celestial light. At all events it is clear that divided responsibility, such as exists in conventional societies, would be only too liable to be shuffled off from the shoulders of one individual to those of another, and also that if the great mass of Mankind were, as individuals, to be thoroughly imbued with Christian principles, the decisions of Governments, and indeed of every Corporation, would be consistent with their spirit and practical intention.

Although it is true that Christianity is addressed in the first instance exclusively to individuals, it is not the less natural, and indeed necessary, that Christians should form themselves into a church or churches. They have need of mutual intercourse, of mutual support, and encouragement, to say nothing of concurrent action for religious or charitable purposes, with a view to more effective results. It is most desirable that they should meet for public worship, and by a joint profession of faith and use in common of the same ritual proclaim the belief entertained by them as individuals, and so by their example promote its further diffusion. Thus formed into bodies more or less numerous, which, however, as experience shows, does not insure identity of opinion, those who constitute a majority must feel sufficient motives for seeking to enjoy the consideration attached to a national church. Among those motives the desire of security and an undoubting reliance on the truth of their own convictions are not the least powerful.

Next comes the union of their Church with the State, a question which rests on grounds of

its own. There may be Christians to any amount in a country without their standing in any recognised or special relation towards the State. There may, as we all know, be a national church unendowed by, and disconnected with, the Civil Government. That union which has for ages been established in every European country, whatever its form of government, is treated throughout a large portion of the New World as a matter of mere convenience or national policy. With us the question can hardly be viewed as open to discussion on general principles. Our Legislature could not decide for disestablishment without giving a violent shock to the long-cherished feelings and habitual convictions of those, both the many and the few, who from the earliest times have formed the backbone of the population, and deranging in many very important respects some of our most deeply-rooted and time-honoured relations, whether legal or social, proprietary or moral. It would require a large and well-proved indictment of short-comings, abuses, and evils resulting from our established system, together with the certainty of being able to replace it by something far better, before we could

be justified in exposing the country to all the consequences of an experiment at once so hazardous and unnecessary. This consideration, I confess, is alone enough for me, and therefore I leave all abstract arguments on the subject to those who either seek for purposes of their own to subvert the existing establishment, or whose love of theoretic perfections blinds them to any objection, however reasonable, which stands in the way of their favourite scheme.

Progress in civilisation is the implied motive of every headlong change in our political system. Be it so; but really it would seem that civilisation presents itself in a very one-sided manner to its most active partisans, who often expose themselves to the charge of forgetting that man has a soul as well as a body. Those, who are not careful to take God with them in the study of his works and their desire to improve the condition of His creatures, content themselves with framing provisions for the material and to a measured degree for the intellectual progress of classes. In this respect they not only fall short of the obligations prescribed by man's natural constitution and the corresponding character

of his wants, but take a position the very reverse of that which was taken by the Author of our religion. Christianity goes directly to the seat of our affections, the heart, and to the source in common with it of our morals, the conscience, enlightened by knowledge of God, and perfected by faith in Christ. It clears no paths in the domain of science; it gives no patronage to the mechanical arts; it leaves even the indispensable field of agriculture to its own resources. Yet no hindrance of any kind is offered thereby to the attainment of knowledge, or to the cultivation of every art and product conducive to the sustenance, the comfort, the progress of mankind. But these things are held by the Saviour to be subordinate to our heavenly concernments; and so they are, not only in a strictly religious sense, but also on the ground of their happiest development being due in the main to those moral virtues which Christ has pre-eminently enjoined. 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.' Matt. vi. 33.

The heads of evidence, under which I propose to state the grounds of my belief that Jesus Christ

was the true Messiah, are sixteen, and I present them in the following order, as being in my opinion the most natural:

I. The probability of an *after* revelation, deducible from the imperfect nature of man and the relation in which he stood from the beginning towards his Almighty Creator.

II. The manifest want, as proved by later circumstances, of such a revelation.

III. The prophetic announcements, both general and personal, relating to Christ.

IV. The fulness of Time.

V. The Saviour's humble plebeian birth notwithstanding His high descent.

VI. The consistency of His character in all its parts.

VII. His perfect, irreproachable example.

VIII. The depth of His principles.

IX. The breadth of His doctrine.

X. His miraculous powers.

XI. His own declarations.

XII. His resurrection.

XIII. The conduct and voluntary sufferings of His apostles and others of His followers.

XIV. The fulfilment of His own prophecies.

XV. The diffusion and establishment of His faith by means of disciples wholly destitute of worldly advantages.

XVI. The beneficial results thereof existing to this hour, and on the whole increasing though slowly, interruptedly, and at times even with partial defections.

I.

That the moral character and principal attributes of the Supreme Deity were brought to the apprehension of man at the time of his creation in a more or less degree seems highly probable of itself, and Scripture at its very commencement moves in harmony with that most natural conjecture. Taking the Bible for guide—and what other historical account of the Creation and its earliest succeeding ages is known to exist?—we see distinctly that our first parents were endowed with faculties which enabled them to understand that certain relations existed between them and their Almighty Creator. They are there represented as having had personal intercourse with Jehovah.

The curse indeed which followed immediately on their transgression would seem to find its justification in their knowledge of those relations. They became liable to punishment because they failed knowingly in their duty to God, who, as the author of their being, and having made them in His own likeness, required that in their conduct they should conform to His will. His attributes of omniscience and omnipotence, of goodness and wisdom in perfection, oblige us to believe that if He had chosen to reveal Himself completely and once for all to His reasonable creatures it was in His power to do so. We cannot of course presume to fathom the depths of Almighty Wisdom, but the fact of a later and final revelation, deferred, as we are told, to the fulness of time, shows unquestionably that it was not in the Divine will to make itself completely known to man in the first instance, and we may perhaps venture to shadow out in part a notion of the reasons which determined that reserve. Without adopting Mr. Darwin's theory that men were originally monkeys, we may conceive of them that time and a long succession of generations were necessary to fit them for receiving with full and

permanent advantage the whole truth. Their knowledge of God's works, and of their own deficiencies had, one may imagine, to be previously increased, the compass of their views to be enlarged, and their faculties to be improved by exercise and mutual intercourse. There is little doubt that mankind, like individuals, had their childhood, and adolescence before they advanced towards a period of maturity. Those who believe in a pre-Adamite population are especially bound to accept this statement as true. Civilisation in a mere secular sense was evidently gradual, not to say slow, on any supposition, and we are assured that the world became so depraved in its first stage as to bring on the destruction of the whole race of man with the exception of a single family. Such at least is the purport of the Scriptural record, and traces still apparent of a calamitous deluge more or less vast, in many parts of the earth go far, with heathen traditions, to confirm its substantial truth. It may be added that before the Christian era in places the most civilised, intellects of the highest order proclaimed the want they felt of a future revelation by the efforts they made, however ineffectually, to

obtain a clearer insight into the nature of God and the prospects of humanity. Nor did the new revelation, when at length it came, exhibit any absence of harmony with those suggestions of the human conscience, those instinctive longings of the soul which long before had acquired a stronghold, with few exceptions on the intellectual universe. In the darkest times God did not leave Himself without witnesses here on earth. St. Augustine has remarked that the real thing, which we now call the Christian religion, existed among the ancients, and was not wholly wanting from the commencement of the human race. Civil affairs are not in the least altered by the Gospel, which leaves every one,—husband and wife, master and servant, magistrate and subjects in their respective relations with each other as before. Locke has taken notice of this in one of his treatises, and surely if any one, he was a careful observer, and an accurate expounder in all cases to which he applied his attention. Did not Christ Himself declare that He came not to destroy, but to confirm or fulfil the Law? Had it been otherwise, had the doctrines promulgated by our Saviour, been other than confirmation in the widest sense of

what the human conscience had in its best anterior enlightenment recognised, sceptics would have been sure to make the most of the discrepancy. We should have been told on that ground, as we have already been told on others of a more fanciful kind, that two contradictory revelations could not possibly have issued from the same omniscient and all-powerful source.

II.

That the world stood in need of a more complete revelation can hardly be denied. Of this some passing notice has been taken in the preceding sentences. The want was undoubtedly felt by minds the most competent, humanly speaking, to supply it. But more than human sagacity was required to accomplish the stupendous work. The passions, whence vice and crime, discord and misery proceed, were practically in full play at the time of our Saviour's advent. Sages, moralists, philosophers, and legislators condemned offences, which nevertheless were freely practised by large majorities, to say the least, of those for whose correction or guidance these laws or precepts were

framed. Massacre in war, slavery and proscription in peace, torture and idolatry at all times, together with orgies of debauchery in the name of religion, were flagrant in those countries where social customs were the most genial, arts the most advanced, science and literature the most cultivated. For these abominable excesses in the pursuit of pleasure, power, and wealth, in the indulgence of hatred, vengeance, envy, pride, and other malevolent or presumptuous feelings, Christianity purposed to establish a purely spiritual worship, humility, universal love, active charity, holiness of life, a constant, earnest, and loving submission to God, all proceeding from the heart itself under an awful yet glorious responsibility. But what, I wonder, would this sublime system of ethics have effected without a divine sanction and a perfect example? We see that even with those immeasurable advantages its progress has been slow in acceptance, slower still in practice where accepted, and having yet to make its due impression on millions and millions of our planet's inhabitants, notwithstanding the zeal of numerous missionaries and the almost unlimited distribution of the Holy

Book. The mustard seed of Scripture has indeed attained the growth of Californian vegetation, but it must expand into a forest before it can give shade and shelter to the entire population for which it was consigned to the ground. We are bound as Christians to believe that its ultimate extension throughout the world is only a question of time, and reasons sufficient to explain the delay are obvious, though few. The abnegation, or at least the restraint of self as a rule of conduct, the warfare so often experienced between flesh and spirit, body and soul, the frequent disparity exhibited by well-meaning Christians between doctrine and practice, operate as powerful drawbacks on the attractive features and imposing behests of Christianity. Converts from other forms of religion have to shake off seductive habits, or to give up fanatical modes of belief impressed upon their minds in childhood. The doctrine of the Trinity can hardly be otherwise than an obstacle in the path of conversion to those who, like the Mahometans, make the simple idea of one God their supreme point of faith. The mere act of passing from a sensuous kind of worship to one of spiritual

purity must be a rude trial for the strongest understanding. A blindfold leap from the one to the other is hardly to be expected or desired. These remarks go far to show that, instead of there being any reason to doubt the want of a supplementary and final revelation at the time of Christ's appearance on earth, much still remains to be done in order to complete and give full effect to that which He declared by His ministry and sealed with His blood.

III.

Prophecy has prepared us for both stages of the Christian Dispensation, for its introduction and also for its completion. The commencement of the prophetic power as a ground of faith and an instrument of salvation dates from the Fall. It was then announced that the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the Serpent, in whose form Satan had worked the ruin of our first parents. Prophecy in the shape of promise, not, indeed, referring to a future revelation, but assuring Man's perpetual exemption from a recurrence of the Deluge, appeared in the Divine communi-

cation made to Noah immediately after that event. At a later period, as we all know, in the same direct form, but having a much higher signification, came to Abraham the prediction that in his seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed. The preternatural birth of Isaac was the earnest of that, the most wonderful, which, in the person of Jesus Christ, was appointed to realise the holy announcement. Our Saviour's own language confirmed it when He said that Abraham rejoiced to see His day, that he saw it and was glad, taking at the same time occasion to manifest His own Divinity by the sublime declaration, '*Before Abraham was, I am.*' Clearer and brighter grew the word of prophecy in succeeding generations. The devout harpings of David were preludes to the song of angels which ushered into human life the immortal Saviour of mankind. The inspired and inspiring radiations of Isaiah were luminous forerunners of that Sun—the Sun of Righteousness—whose beams, once seen above the horizon, would never cease to enlighten, though often by a mere glimmer of dawn, the darkest corners of our globe. 'Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given:

and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.' 'There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.' Such are the words of the Great Prophet, and further down in the course of time came Daniel, who also appears to have received intimation of that Spiritual kingdom which in due season would overshadow all earthly powers. 'Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver and the gold broken to pieces together, and become like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.' 'And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never

be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.'

Observe, moreover, that the new revelation prepared by Almighty Wisdom was not only thus announced in general terms, but the very person and special character of Him who was appointed from of old to declare and establish it, were described many centuries before in language not to be mistaken. What says Isaiah in this respect? 'His visage was so marred more than any man and His form more than the sons of men.' 'To Him whom man despiseth, to Him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship.' 'He hath no form, nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected of men: a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.' 'He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a

sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth.' What says the royal Psalmist? 'The Kings of the earth stand up, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed.' 'I will preach the law whereof the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee.' Again, 'Thou art fairer than the children of men: full of grace are Thy lips, because God hath blessed Thee for ever,' alluding probably to His doctrine and language, perhaps also to His tone of voice and demeanour, possibly even to the expression of His countenance. 'Gird Thee with Thy sword upon Thy thigh, O Thou most Mighty, according to Thy worship and renown. Good luck have Thou with Thine honour; ride on because of the word of truth, of meekness, and of righteousness, and Thy right hand shall teach Thee terrible things. Thy arrows are very sharp, and the people shall be subdued unto Thee, even in the midst among the king's enemies.' Well may we exclaim in the words of the great, the earlier prophet, 'How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of Him that bringeth good tidings of good, that

publisheth salvation, that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!'

It is not my intention to note every link in the chain of prophetic evidence, and still less to go into the controversial arguments which bear on the whole or any particular portion of it. The object I have in view would not be advanced by such prolixity. If used in the matter of prophecy, it would also be required in treating the other chief branches of evidence applied to Christianity. The learning necessary for dissertation belongs more especially to professional or professed writers. . In this brief sketch I have not even quoted some well-known passages in the Old Testament, which in few words, but with an outline sufficiently definite, shadow out the perfect revelation to come in the person of an anointed Saviour. Herein the most superficial readers of Scripture will require no reminder beyond a bare mention of such names as Abraham, Moses, and David. The respective testimonies of their later successors have left a dying but consistent echo in the very last of the prophetic pages of the Old Testament. With respect to Moses in particular, the Gospel of St. Luke

contains the following passage, speaking of our Saviour after His resurrection: 'Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.'

Who can turn from the contemplation of these successive and harmonious predictions without a strong conviction of their essential truth, realised as it was by the whole tenour of our Lord's career? Their divine character is confirmed by the very unwillingness of the Jews, especially of their rulers, to accept it, in as much as the personal condition, the meekness, poverty, and purely spiritual doctrine of Jesus were utterly at variance with the ideas which, in spite of written prophecy, they entertained of the promised Messiah. The Jews were confirmed in the expectation of a mere earthly king by that pride of race and nation which so strongly marked their character, and gave to most of them a fatal obliquity of understanding.

IV.

The Gospel was announced as about to come in the fulness of time, and so completely did the fact, when it occurred, correspond with that remarkable expression, that unbelievers have taken advantage of the coincidence to argue from it that the success of Christianity was mainly traceable to the circumstances which made it opportune. Those circumstances are so well known that to name the chief of them is almost a needless trial of the reader's patience. In the first place, there was a general expectation even in the heathen world that some great personage, appointed to confer immense benefits on the human race, was on the eve of appearing. Much aid was also derived from the scattered condition of the Jews, who had large establishments, or who at least resided in considerable numbers at sundry important places in the three great continents then known ; at Babylon for instance, Antioch, Alexandria, to say nothing of Rome, Ephesus, Athens and elsewhere. The prevalent use of the Greek language, and the extension of Roman power through so large a portion, east

and west, of territories emerging from barbarism, were also, no doubt, efficient in opening ways for the reception of Christianity. At Jerusalem itself much of what realised in particular the truth of prophetic foresight may justly be ascribed to the establishment in that city of Rome's imperial authority. Can we for a moment suppose that God is inferior to man in the wisdom of securing success by a judicious adaptation of means to a preconceived end? Who in his senses would think even of planting a tree without reference to season, soil, and situation? No: we may shut our eyes, but we cannot thereby obliterate, or even alter the objects of sight. We may withhold our conviction from the accomplishment of prophecy, but the concurrent circumstances which prove it remain the same.

V.

It was foretold that the Saviour would come 'in the fulness of time,' and the time of Christ's appearance tallied, as I have already shown, with the obvious meaning of that term. He came at the allotted period, and in what manner did He come

Though marvels of a Divine character attended His birth, He was wrapped in swaddling cloths, and laid in a manger. No marks of wealth or dignity surrounded His person. He took upon Him the form of a servant, He was subject to his parents, He shared their humble lot, and when He entered upon His public ministry, it was asked contemptuously whether He was not Joseph the carpenter's son.

But surely it must strike the least observant among us that to these plebeian circumstances was owing in a great measure the sympathetic reception which His religion experienced from the pagan masses. His doctrine, though addressed to all, was more especially applicable to them. In answer to the Baptist's enquiry He says, 'the poor have the Gospel preached unto them,' and with this by way of climax, He concludes the number of acts which He mentions in proof of His divine mission. Of the rich He almost despairs. In a worldly point of view He was not one of them. He threw in His lot with the millions, who like Himself were more immediately dependent on Heaven for their daily bread. It required all the pride of the Jewish priesthood, and all the prejudiced devotion

of their votaries, to obstruct the progress and to delay the triumph of the Gospel.

The priestly authorities, when they had resolved upon His death, resorted to the hours of darkness to take Him, 'because they feared the people.' Constantine must have known that popular opinion marched before Him when he proclaimed his adoption of the Christian Faith, and made way for a Christian bishop to take his seat in the chair of the Cæsars. Catching inspiration from the Sibyls, the delightful poet of Mantua exclaimed,

'Hic vir, hic est, tibi quem promitti sæpius audis!

Little did he imagine that, while he was sounding the praises of his imperial friend, he ignorantly heralded the approach of that far greater One, who would not only recall the golden age, and extend his sway beyond the confines of India, but whose government was destined to comprise the whole earth, and to establish the law of peace in the hearts of all mankind. In proportion as the spirit of Christianity was understood, it could not but find its way to the hearts of the people; and Virgil, in ascribing to Augustus what applied on juster

grounds and in a degree immeasurably higher to Christ, flattered the emperor by placing to his credit those elements of popularity which existed in the object of general expectation. The genealogy, which placed our Saviour in the line of descent from David and the Patriarchs, was, no doubt, agreeable to the Jews in general, but if He had possessed the wealth of Abraham, or wielded the sceptre of David, could He have enjoyed that access to the sympathies of the people which the circumstances of His birth were so well calculated to obtain?

VI.

A personal character consistent in all its parts, consistent also with prophecy, and with doctrine, could not fail to operate powerfully in favour of a religious and moral legislator. So perfect was the consistency that the more our Saviour was known, and the more He was scrutinised, the greater was the love, the confidence, the admiration of those who approached Him during His ministry. The full light of day shone upon all His actions. He lived in habitual fellowship with

His disciples; sinners of every description were admitted to His presence; He did not refuse the society of women; He sat down to table with the rich; He led for some time a life of publicity; He frequented the synagogues; He taught assembled multitudes, and shrank not from the misery of the sick or from the treacherous duplicity of lawyers. He was so thoroughly a man that He felt our passions and was subject to our infirmities; but, nevertheless, His virtues maintained their even tenour, and sin had no dominion over Him. It has been written of Alexander the Great that 'he subdued all things but himself,' and of Julius Cæsar that he was 'the world's great Master and *his own*.' Archimedes is reported to have said of himself, that he could move the earth if he had a proper standing-place. Christ, who appeared neither in the guise of a conqueror, nor in that of a philosopher, achieved in a spiritual region far greater conquests than either the Greek or the Roman, and used a lever for lifting the minds of mankind as powerful as that which the Sicilian engineer sighed for in vain.

VII.

If the consistency of our Saviour's character in itself be one of the many proofs which entitle Him to our belief, how greatly is its efficacy increased by the perfect harmony exhibited between that character and His professions, more especially by His conduct. It was not only by word of mouth and the spirit, but emphatically by personal example that He strove to establish His empire in the hearts of men. He preached humility, and He was humble in all His actions susceptible of that quality; He recommended prayer, and was frequent and earnest in the practice of that form of devotion; He pressed upon His disciples the duty of forgiveness, even to the extent of returning good for evil, and to the last hour of His life He inculcated that difficult lesson by His own example. 'Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.' He taught us to pray that we may not be led into temptation, and by undergoing the trial Himself He showed in what manner it was to be resisted and overcome. His doctrine involved the duty of an entire dependence upon

God, and a total submission to His will. The possibility of living up to these exalted obligations He fully exemplified by His own conduct in the wilderness, on the lake, in the garden, and on the cross. Some writer has drawn a distinction between two military commanders by describing the one as saying to his soldiers in action, 'Forward, my children!' and the other as himself charging at their head. The man of meekness, forbearance, and humility, belonged to the latter class, and still after eighteen centuries He maintains the same position, no longer in His temporary form on earth, but in the faith of His followers and the records of His life.

If anything were wanted to complete His character as bearing the impress of Deity, we have only to seek it in those remarkable lectures which, under the title of '*Christ satisfying the instincts of humanity*,' have increased the debt we all owe to the eloquent and effective pen of Dr. Vaughan.

The credit of a revelation rests on the completeness of its authority. The Son of God took upon Him our nature, as it would seem, that He might be a pattern to mankind, as well as a teacher of

divine truth. To show His sufficiency in the former character was a great help, if not a necessary step, to his acceptance in the latter. Christ, by His human sympathies and manifest perfection in their exercise, completed that consistency which of right claims so large a share in our convictions.

Of one great instinct of our nature there is, indeed, no trace in the account of His life; and the exception conveys to my mind an additional proof of His divinity. How could the Godhead be subject to any feeling of GRATITUDE? The want of it in some who had experienced Christ's benevolence did not escape His notice, but the Giver of all good was under obligation to no one on earth.

VIII.

Moreover, in the depth of principle on which His doctrines are founded we recognise another evidence of their truth. Where could Humanity find a more profound and efficient source of motive and action than in the love and fear of that all-perfect Being whom we are taught to worship under the endearing name of Father, omniscient, omnipresent, eternal, unchangeable? That single

appellation makes a brotherhood of all mankind, not only in name, but in reality of feeling and correspondent practice adapted to relative positions and circumstance. We can do nothing, we cannot abstain from doing anything without a motive, at times, it may be, unconsciously, but still there must be a motive as cause and spring of any positive action or resolution. Out of the heart, as we are told on the best authority, that is out of self, proceed those passions, feelings, fancies, and evil inclinations, with which our better nature is at variance, and which we are taught to control under the heaviest responsibilities. What stronger motives can we have in a moral sense for keeping those enemies of our happiness in subjection than the fear and love of God, and that charity, the interest of all directly and reciprocally, which St. Paul has so well described? Where in the heart or in the head, where in the whole stretch of nature can be found principles which go so completely to the root and source of all morality? In this respect, if in no other, the Christian dispensation differs essentially from the Mosaic. The fear and love of God were indeed inculcated by Moses, but with a view, in no small part, to worldly

advantages, and nothing was so dear to the Jewish heart as the pride of exclusiveness, the devotion to forms, and the destruction of enemies, all of which characteristics were the very reverse of those belonging to Christianity. In other respects also the Christian dispensation differed from that of Moses. Not only did it rest upon principles of greater depth, but with very few exceptions, if any, it rested on principles alone. Unlike the great religion which preceded it, unlike the false religion which followed it, no special legislation, enforced by earthly penalties, is to be found in its precepts. This distinction is so manifest that slavery and suicide have been defended on the ground of their not being branded with any special prohibition in the Gospel. To an argument of this kind the answer is obvious. The whole spirit of the Gospel condemns such practices. Take the case of slavery. 'Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you.' Would anyone like to be made a slave? The final, the universal religion must, one would think, be a religion of principles; and seeing that such is the religion of Christ, are we not bound the more to believe in its divine origin?

IX.

The principles of the Christian Revelation are not more remarkable and exhaustive in point of depth than are its doctrines in that of breadth. Other forms of religion are but too apt to engender feelings of enmity towards the professors of rival creeds, and a conceit of superior excellence on the part of their own respective votaries. The religion of Mahomet, who is thought to have framed his Koran in the moral parts not sparingly upon the tenets and sacred books of Christianity, affords a striking example of this illiberal spirit. His followers are taught to view and to deal with their co-religionists as brothers, but to treat as enemies all those who put no faith in their prophet—to exterminate if they resist, to enslave them if they submit. Look to the castes of India, that frightful offspring of sectional animosity, and remember how they operate to nourish prejudice, and to separate one portion of mankind from another. Different indeed is the doctrine of the Gospel from these deplorable instances of human inhumanity. Love without limits, varying only in degree,

kindness even to enemies, the return of good for evil, forgiveness to the extent of seventy times seven and not stopping there, constitute the essential character of that Divine message. Would that the practice flowed on a level with the doctrines themselves! Their never-ceasing disparity shows but too plainly how much the world, as we call it, stood in need of that Revelation which came in the fulness of time! Alas! in the very centre of Christendom this want has long been manifested by cruel distortions of truth, and the assumption of powers entirely at variance with the spirit of Christianity and the recorded language of our Saviour, 'My kingdom is not of this world!' 'Give unto Cæsar, the things that are Cæsar's.'

Consider for a moment the morality of Christ in a worldly sense alone. Its rules of conduct in life are exhaustive. They have nothing of their own kind beyond, nothing below them. They might be adopted generally to the profit of mankind as the mere results of human research and human experience. But they come to us with the additional, the surpassing advantage of a Divine sanction manifested in a manner and to a degree

peculiarly their own. They are, moreover, confirmed, and shown to be capable of sustained practice, by an example equally Divine. Viewed in their full extent, they are found to comprise the whole duty of man. When steadily and perseveringly carried out, what, I venture to ask, are their ordinary results even here on earth but the health and happiness of individuals, the peace and welfare of communities, the strength and independence of each nation in its domestic affairs, the advantage and security of all in their foreign relations? If they often fall short in practical effect, the doctrine itself is by no means to blame. We must all feel that the frailties and perversity of our nature are the real causes of their present comparative failure. Pearls of inestimable value are placed within our reach, but few are they who appreciate them to the full, and treat them as the best part of their household treasure. It must be allowed that among the philosophers of antiquity there were some who reached a high degree of moral elevation, but the best of their systems were rotten at the root. Self-esteem, worldly considerations, the love of quiet, the pride of mental serenity, and fear of the con-

sequences of excess are shallow motives compared with those of the Christian system.. In the latter there is love apart from self, the universe contrasted with a spot, happiness supplied from infinite sources, instead of being confined to one or several of a narrow and unstable kind. More than this, the mind imbued with them draws nourishment and character from the pure springs of action by which it is quickened as by Christ Himself. Something more and more approaching to spiritual takes the place of its original nature, and love in its most exalted sense expands by habitual exercise into communion with that Divine attribute from which the best of Christians derive their highest aspirations, and indeed every spiritual grace.

X.

I have now to touch upon a great question in few words. The question I refer to is that of Miracles, and it may be called emphatically *a question*, because it has afforded matter of disputation more, at least, than any other of the evidences brought forward in support of Christianity. In

proportion to its importance in argument, and its extraordinary character, we are entitled to have it cleared of all doubt, and established in point of fact on solid grounds. When Christ presented Himself to the Jewish public as having to promulgate a new mode of faith, it was natural and fitting that He should be required to accredit His mission by some proof of divine authority. What more efficient for that purpose than to show that He possessed the power of working miracles—that is, the faculty of altering by a word the course, or regular appearances of nature? Miracle enough it was for Him to agree in person and character with the prophetic announcements of the Messiah; but Jesus, though on more than one occasion He expressed impatience at being urged to 'give signs and wonders,' appears to have acknowledged the fitness of His being expected to perform miracles in proof of His having a divine commission. In answer to the Baptist's inquiry whether He was the real Christ, it will be remembered that He mentioned miracles among those acts of His which were to accredit Him as the true Messiah. The inquiry was natural; the answer reasonable. When an

Ambassador is sent from one court or nation to another, the first thing he has to do on reaching the place of his destination is to give proof of his being duly authorised to speak and act for the Sovereign he professes to represent. He is not indeed required to perform miracles; but he is expected to produce his credentials. A prophet, or divine legislator, may be described with propriety as an Ambassador from God. His obvious credential is the exercise of preternatural power, of power not possessed by other men, or derivable from any human source.

This condition belonged especially to our Saviour's ministry, because it had been foretold as one of His attributes. Much as a miracle is to be expected, and fairly required under the circumstances, it is not the less hard to be received. Among our first impressions on the occasion suspicion is quite as active as wonder. We mistrust the performer, we mistrust our own senses. After all, we can form no idea of the means employed, or of the process by which the miraculous effect is produced. It is reported of the great Napoleon that, in talking of apparitions on one occasion, he said it was a

question of *fact.* Who could explain the existence of a blade of grass? So is it with miracles. Our belief must turn upon the credibility of the evidence, of that of the eye-witness in the first instance, of that of the reporters in the second. Now, what are among the principal miracles ascribed to our Lord? If my recollection of them be correct, they were the conversion of water into wine, the feeding of multitudes in the wilderness, the marvellous draught of fishes, the cure of the ten lepers, the walking on water, the calming of a storm, the restoration of the blind man's sight, and—most wonderful of all—the raising of Lazarus from the dead. These eight miracles may be taken as examples of the various kinds of miracle attributed to Christ. The many others described in one or all of the Gospels require no particular notice in these pages. The performance of a single miracle, free from suspicion of fraud or illusion, might have sufficed to accredit a divine revelation. The very first miracle performed by Moses in Pharaoh's presence was a failure, because it had pleased God to harden the king's heart and to encourage or to allow the magicians of the

court to display a similar prodigy. But it is evident that a miracle was thought to be necessary in order to obtain evidence for any one who assumed the character of a prophet. When Elijah pitted his prophetic character against that of the priests of Baal, it was the miracle of fire from heaven that gave him the victory and cost them their lives. God, or the angel of God, Himself condescended to accredit His personal communication to Moses in Mount Horeb by changing a rod or wand into a serpent, and afterwards by restoring it to its original shape. Miraculous appearances even in modern times have been enlisted in the service of some local sanctity or of some religious opinion. But it has been remarked that our Saviour's miracles have in every instance this distinctive quality. They lie open to the perception and judgment of the senses. Morbid sensibilities and excited imaginations have nothing to do with them. The broad light of day shone upon them; eye-witnesses to the fact were never wanting, and sometimes, we may remember, large crowds of spectators were present. Surely amongst those numbers many scrutinising and incredulous minds were to be

found. Such and so positive was the immediate evidence by test of which we determine the reality of Christ's miracles. With respect to the Scriptural accounts of them, we are not at liberty, I believe, to distinguish them in point of authority from other portions of the Gospel narrative. They are interwoven with the story—the quadrilateral we might call it—of a life, remarkable above all others for its consistency and transparent candour. They stand or fall with the whole fabric. If they possess in some cases a special vitality of their own, the account of the man born blind and restored to sight, as given by St. John, is perhaps the most striking of all. It is impossible, I conceive, to read it without an overpowering conviction of its truth, derived from the simplicity of the language combined with a singular perspicuity and effectiveness in the particulars. The most spiteful homethrusts are there parried by the most telling replies. In the midst of cavils, shivered into splinters, the truth emerges simple, great, unshaken. 'One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see.'

XI.

Our holy Redeemer's declarations as to His person and office, the necessity and efficacy of belief in Him, the essential importance of the Sacraments and other co-ordinate features of Christianity, present themselves to the mind with peculiar force when following immediately upon the preceding points of Evidence. The declarations of His Divinity were to all appearance intentionally graduated. His miraculous birth and the wonderful circumstances which accompanied it were little known, or forgotten, except by His nearest relations and their immediate friends, when He began His public ministry. Sixteen or eighteen years had elapsed from the time when in His boyhood He had displayed a remarkable acquaintance with the writings of the Old Testament. He was known as the son of Joseph the carpenter, and had probably worked as a carpenter himself, when He entered in public on His high mysterious calling. It was not till after His baptism and temptation that He began to preach. St. Matthew relates that when Jesus came up from the water He saw the heavens

opened, and 'the Spirit of God descended like a dove and lighted upon Him.' It is not stated that any one else except the Baptist saw this phenomenon, or heard the voice from heaven which followed. St. Mark's relation of the same circumstances differs only in words from that of St. Matthew. St. Luke in shorter terms, but substantially to the same effect, agrees in the main with the two preceding Evangelists. St. John, referring to the same events, uses these words, 'John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon Him;' but it appears not from him that any others either witnessed the miraculous appearance or heard the heavenly voice. According to St. Matthew, in the early part of His ministry, while He gave signs of professing preternatural and miraculous powers He only styled Himself the Son of Man, and even then did not escape the danger of being charged with the capital offence of blasphemy. A little later in the same gospel He is described as saying the 'Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath day.' When the Pharisees accused Him, He withdrew, as if the time had not yet come for a full declaration. To

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His disciples He was more explicit, when He spoke of the 'Son of Man as sending forth His angels in the end of the world.' He was not completely so when, upon St. Peter's saying to Him, 'Thou art Christ the Son of the living God,' He replied, 'Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.' Afterwards He said to His disciples, 'The Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He shall reward every one according to His works.' In the 26th chapter of St. Matthew's gospel it is stated that, being adjured in God's name by the High Priest to say whether He was the Christ, the Son of God, Jesus answered, 'Thou hast said, nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.' Matt. xxviii. When the chosen disciples saw Him in Galilee after His resurrection and worshipped Him, and some doubted, Jesus said to them, 'All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the

Holy Ghost! . . . . Lo! I am with you to the end of the world!'

According to the Gospel of St. Mark, Jesus intimated that He was the Son of God, by referring to that Psalm in which David is described as having called the future Messiah, 'Lord.' The same Evangelist states that when the High Priest asked Him, 'Art thou the Christ the Son of the Blessed,' Jesus said 'I am: and ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven!' Thus we have the testimony of two Evangelists to the reality of this conclusive declaration proceeding from the mouth of One who showed by the whole tenour of His public life that He was incapable of falsehood, and proving by its consequences how necessary it was that He should complete His ministry before He declared Himself completely. The graduated character of His personal declarations thus shown to have taken place is fully explained by what finally occurred, namely, His condemnation to death as soon as the culminating declaration was made. It is evident that an earlier publication of the truth would have put an end to His ministry at once.

The immediate cause of His crucifixion on the part of the Jews was the idea of blasphemy they attached to His final words in answer to the High Priest, and on the part of Pilate that governor's fear of being accused at Rome of having befriended a pretender to the Jewish crown.

XII.

We come now to that wonderful and decisive fact, the resurrection of our Lord's crucified body, that fact of which St. Paul declared that if it were not true, the Apostles, and indeed the believers in Christ generally, were the most miserable of men. It is worthy of remark that the resurrection of our Saviour is nowhere mentioned in Scripture as a fact attested by eye-witnesses. The truth of it rests on the disappearance of the body from the Sepulchre in which it had been laid, on the position of the burial-clothes within the Sepulchre, on the angelic attendance and injunction given there, on the several subsequent appearances of the Lord's person, and finally on His visible ascension to heaven. All these circumstances are distinctly

related in parts of Scripture received from the earliest times as being of undoubted authority. It may be added that those circumstances, which more immediately regard the sepulchre and what took place there on the discovery of its no longer containing the crucified body, are mentioned in each of the four Gospels, not exactly in the same terms, but in meaning substantially the same as to the essential point. Variations of this kind, and the coincident, though circumstantial character of the evidence, are surely to be taken as confirming the truth of the main incident by excluding altogether the supposition of collusion or any other form of deception. How natural it was that Peter, of all the Apostles, should have been the first to see Him after the resurrection, as St. Luke relates in the last chapter of his gospel!

The palpable appearances of our Lord after His resurrection was the all-important point. If any weight beyond that of the fact could be given to it, we might look to the wonder itself for the addition.

Christ, viewed exclusively as man, possessed intellectual powers of the highest order. He was

also truth itself, and wisdom itself. Is it to be conceived that a legislator thus gifted could possibly have made an event by anticipation so utterly incredible, the corner-stone of His new religious faith? It is clear that such an article of belief, unsupported by positive proof, could only have exposed its author to rejection, mockery, and insult.

The resurrection of the human body after its decomposition in the grave is certainly a startling demand upon our faith. But, independent of the scriptural facts, what authority have we for limiting that power which, in the beginning, created all things? Why should it be more difficult for the Almighty to revive our bodies for another state of existence than to have brought them into the world which they now inhabit? The principle of life is still hidden from the researches of science, and we, in the certainty of death, may yet most reasonably rely upon the power of God, and the promises of Christ, already realised by His own resurrection.

XIII.

It was a thorough belief in the truth of the resurrection that more than anything else enabled the Apostles and other early Christians to bear up against the hardships and sufferings which their zeal in propagating the Gospel drew upon them. Their journeys alone exposed them to peril by sea and land. The violence of infidel mobs occasionally brought their lives into immediate danger. In times of authorised persecution those who escaped martyrdom found refuge underground in caves and catacombs, where life and death lay side by side in straitened darkness. Nothing in short could shake their faith or detach them from the observance of its practical obligations. No doubt there were cases of individual weakness which did not come under this description; but we must presume them to have been exceptional. What authentic reason is there for supposing that the mass of those who professed Christianity did not stand manfully to their colours in defiance of terror, derision, and pain?

Moreover, their numbers continued to increase.

Persecution had no permanent effect in checking the progress of their belief. It acted as a landslip, which, falling into the channel of a river, does but accumulate the waters until they either overflow their banks with fertilising spread, or gather strength and volume sufficient to sweep away the casual obstruction. Apart from any positive statistics, this may be fairly inferred from the passions of jealousy, fear, and hatred, which raged among the adversaries of Christianity, and were in fact the immediate causes of open persecution. When at length the new and purifying faith was adopted by imperial authority, it is obvious that popular opinion on a large scale must have given the decisive impulse to its triumph. This elevation of a Christian Bishop to the central throne of European government and also of European idolatry, being the consequence of a wide-spread acceptance of Christianity by the masses, was a gigantic stride towards the accomplishment of that parable by which our Saviour compared the kingdom of heaven to a grain of mustard seed which grows from being the least of seeds to the size of a tree in whose branches the birds of the air might roost.

XIV.

This parable was not the only expression of our Lord's prophetic power. Many of those who fell short of accepting His mission in its full development, confessed Him to be a mighty prophet, and His title to that designation has been confirmed by other predictions of His, beside that of the mustard seed's growth. Every one is acquainted with the beautiful and affecting words by which He foretold the destruction of Jerusalem. Christ also foretold His own death, and the denial of Peter. It cannot be necessary to pursue this part of the subject further. What is stated above suffices to show that the evidence of Christianity derived from ancient prophecy is carried out by the prophetic power ascribed on authentic grounds to our Saviour Himself.

Of a kin with the power of foretelling future events were several incidents recorded in Scripture of Christ, and which, to use a modern phrase, might be classed under the name of second sight. Such were His preparatory commands for entering Jerusalem, and also for the celebration of His last

supper, His anticipation of Judas's betrayal, and His knowledge, when out of sight, of Nathaniel's position and employment. But these are secondary points. Jesus is described in St. Luke's gospel as Himself asserting His prophetic character. 'It cannot be that a *prophet* perish out of Jerusalem.' In the same gospel these words are applied to Him: 'Jesus of Nazareth, a *prophet* mighty in deed and word before God and all the people.'

XV.

The establishment of Christianity in the capital of the Roman Empire by no means reached the fulness of His prophetic announcement. The amazing progress of our faith in the ages succeeding that event, however satisfactory and prospectively promising, is almost superfluous in point of evidence. The diminution of its rate in latter years might act as a discouragement of our more sanguine expectations; but it may be well to bear in mind that progress in every matter is liable to variation, and that its continuance at the same rate is more to be desired than from natural causes

to be expected. It cannot be denied that, looking to Africa and Asia, Christianity has met with obstacles which, with small exceptions, have yet to be overcome. Even in those extensive portions of India, over which the British Government exercise a supreme political authority, the zeal of missionaries and the increased intercourse of the natives with European Christians have been attended with a mere sprinkling of conversions. False religions, whether by doctrine or in form, maintain their hold on the population through regions of vast extent. Abyssinia, and some portions of Africa, may even be cited as having declined from the profession of Christianity. On the other hand, America and Australia, to say nothing of some among the numerous islands of the Pacific, are not only receptacles of the true faith on a very extensive scale, but are calculated by a rapid natural process to become exclusively Christian throughout their immense territories. In countries hitherto sealed to any sort of enlightenment, prejudices are gradually yielding to the influence of superior knowledge from the west, and interests created by commerce, and political dependence, can hardly fail to open

channels for the reception of a creed which tends to bring all nations into the bond of universal kindness and profitable intercourse. Let us not forget that the whole of Spain, with the exception of a narrow mountainous district, was occupied during many centuries by the Moors from Africa, idolators at one time, Mahometans at another, before the remnant of Christian inhabitants were able to drive them out, and to establish in their place that form of worship and doctrine which, under the sway of Philip the Second, became so deeply rooted and so utterly exclusive.

XVI.

More confidence and further hope may be derived from the contemplation of Christianity with respect to its actual results. To expect perfection in those results would betray a strange misconception of human nature, its passions and its defects. St. John in his First Epistle affirms that God sent His son to be the propitiation for our sins. Does not this passage imply at once the greatness of the sacrifice, and by consequence, the greatness

of that sinfulness for the remission of which the sacrifice was made? In truth the human heart presents as much resistance to the practice of Christian doctrines, as the world at large presents to their acceptance. In considering the results of Christianity we must therefore dismiss the idea of perfection other than extremely gradual from our minds. Why was the Law denounced as being unable to effect justification? Why was faith proclaimed as being alone able to produce that effect? Why but because nobody could reasonably pretend to keep the law so entirely as to attain complete righteousness under it, and also because the forms of law might be kept without any adequate amendment of the heart?

With these considerations in view we may venture to assert that in sundry most important respects Christianity has produced a great and unquestionable improvement in the general conduct of those, whether persons or nations by whom its truth has been accepted. I have already stated that it does not suit my purpose to go exhaustively or even deeply into these questions. I cannot, however, abstain from calling to mind some few

of the evil practices which prevailed among the heathen, even the most enlightened, of old, and which have been denounced by modern legislation in Christendom. First in the list stands slavery, whether as a trade or as a social institution. It would be an insult to enumerate the benefits conferred upon society by that one renunciation of an odious crime. It has been pleaded in favour of slavery that it is nowhere condemned in the Gospel. The answer is obvious. The whole spirit of Christianity is against it. 'Do unto others as you would they should do unto you?' Would any one desire that others should make him a slave?

Cruel legislative punishments, and cruel usages in war, have in many instances yielded to the softening influence of Christianity. Protection of animals from cruelty may be classed under the same head. The care of the poor, the abundance of charitable institutions, and compulsory taxation for the relief of pauperism, may be justly ascribed to the teaching of Christ. The legislative repression of licentiousness, and a more general respect for the female portion of mankind are also in great measure the results of our Christian faith. These more salient instances

of improvement in law and morals are enough to show the active operation of Christianity after the lapse of so many centuries. It is not only a living agent in these latter times, but its agency increases and extends, slowly, if you please, and with frequent checks and partial interruptions, yet still on the whole deeply and expansively, considering the incrustation of vicious propensities it has to penetrate, and the midnight ignorance it has to encounter, more or less in every part of the world.

This brief and imperfect summary is intended to represent in natural sequence the links of a chain of evidence having strength sufficient to resist the united weights of all the doubts which Cavillers and Sceptics have scraped together from time to time. The stumbling-blocks which arrest them in the course of inquiry are generally known, and have been treated with a view to their removal by writers well qualified to examine and demonstrate their insignificance if such be the character justly ascribed to them. It appears to me that the argument involved in my statement of leading evidences deprives them in a comparative sense of any real importance. Consider by way of analogy, that a

conviction of God's benevolence is in no way shaken by the numerous cases of suffering and of evil which, according to our comprehension, exists in this world of His creation.

There remains one very large question which I will not entirely pass by, as the little I have to offer respecting it may be comprised in half-a-dozen sentences. I allude to the discrepancy which seems to exist between the account of the earliest periods brought to our knowledge by Moses, and certain discoveries which modern science adopts as irrefragable truths. It is no business of mine to question either the truth of those discoveries or the correctness of the inferences deduced from them. What I have to suggest on behalf of the Bible is independent of any such question. Without presumption, I conceive, it may be asserted that the objects to which the Holy Scriptures were originally addressed, were the bringing to man's knowledge the character and will of the Supreme Being, the relation in which His creatures endowed with reason stand towards Him their Creator, the final destination which eventually awaits them, and the conditions which are to

determine the place of each individual in the adverse portions of that destination. Now, what necessary dependence has the revelation of these matters upon science as applied to natural objects, whether astronomical, geological, or any other department of human research? With respect to any of the above-mentioned points so deeply interesting to mankind, can it be said to signify whether the earth turns round the sun, or the sun round the earth; whether the earth is millions of years old, or only six thousand? Is it not true that the Bible conveys to our understandings a distinct view of the things essential for the salvation of our souls? Can anything be more sublime than the idea it presents of God? Anything more effective for the government of our thoughts, words, and actions, than what we obtain from that source? What was the language of our blessed Redeemer to the Sadducees, when they sought to embarrass Him with their questions and remarks? 'Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures and the power of God!'

Returning to the Mission of Christ, and His identification as the true Messiah and Son of God

by reason of the leading evidences taken in their connection with each other, are we not warranted in holding as light the sceptical objections to Christianity in comparison with the mass of proof afforded by those evidences? A divine revelation, unless it be made by a flash of light or by a hand-writing on the wall, must be brought to the conviction of mankind by the instrumentality of human agents. As a necessary consequence of our original constitution all human agency must be more or less imperfect. Does it not follow that whatever comes to us through that medium must be liable to the effects of its inherent weakness? If this be so, we cannot with reason wonder that even the Holy Scriptures should not be entirely free from verbal errors or critical difficulties. Perfection in those respects would be unnatural, and inspiration may fairly be held to answer its legitimate purpose if it serve to secure the conveyance of essential truth to our minds. Supposing a dozen persons had witnessed an accident occurring in some public street, and they were examined one after the other as to the fact. Surely their agreement on the main point, if there were no reason to

suspect collusion, would outweigh any conceivable difference in their respective reports of the particulars. The evidence may be more satisfactory, the conviction more intense when there is a total absence of discrepancy; but are we entitled to require a more thorough concordance in the proofs of spiritual truths than we commonly accept as sufficient to settle our judgment in matters of secular concern?

It is now time to draw towards a conclusion. Let the whole of what precedes be candidly considered. However defective in point of treatment, it surely exhibits a wonderful instance of that circumstantial connection, that convergence of numerous testimonies to a common centre, which for reasons already stated was hardly to be expected and which we do not require for belief and direction of conduct in ordinary cases. Consistency in all the links of a chain of evidence carried through the whole extent of time, from the very beginning of history to the present hour, is almost a miracle in itself, and certainly without a corresponding example in the annals of mankind. Such evidence will appear more strikingly peculiar

when we take into view the variety of its component parts, the liability to personal weaknesses in some of them, the general candour of the fundamental narratives, and the spirit of hostile scrutiny which has attended its progress throughout.

What in vernacular language we designate as spots in the sun are ascertained by astronomers to be vast tracts of inferior lustre or of downright opacity, yet do we not the less acknowledge that glorious orb to be the centre of light in our system, a nurse of life in all its planetary dependencies and a source of vivifying heat, the extinction of which would plunge us into irrecoverable destruction? Supposing a far brighter luminary — the sun of salvation—to be extinguished in our minds, whither should we turn for a hope, however small, for a glimmer of hopeful light, beyond the cold, dark goal of our earthly existence? If we reject that wondrous series of evidences, some single portions of which go far to settle a Christian's belief, and the whole of which may truly be said to leave infidelity without an excuse, what can the unbeliever offer to make up for so immense a sacrifice? Senses, faculties, affections obliterated for ever, our nature

degraded almost to a level with the beasts that perish, our motives of action reduced to vanities, appetites, and earthly interests — a forfeiture, in short, of every promise for which saints have toiled, crusaders have fought, the hermit has courted poverty, and the martyr has died in tortures. Such and no other are the substitutes he would have us accept for all the consolations, the spiritual supports, the ennobling convictions, and the prospective glories of our faith. He would renew the fall, and annul the redemption of our race. The exchange he proposes has too much the stamp of loss to engage my assent. The evidences I have enumerated satisfy my reason, and the hopes they warrant sustain my spirit. In them I find a comfort and a strength, which in Christ's name and with God's assistance I would fain hold fast unto the end.

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